

A NORTHERNER'S VIEWS ON UNION.

It is interesting to see what members of the Northern Church think and say on the subject of union between their Church and ours. Rev. William M. Woodfin, of St. Louis, has an interesting article on this subject in the Philadelphia Presbyterian of August 23rd.

He first reviews briefly, but clearly, the action taken by our Assembly in appointing the committee to confer with the Northern Assembly's committee on this whole subject. He then says:

"The situation we face is one in which we very earnestly desire union with a Church, a very large constituency of which does not desire union with us, and those who may favor such union are not proclaiming the fact in very loud tones. It behooves us, therefore, to face the situation as it is, and there can be no harm to the cause by letting the entire Church know the real facts in the matter.

"We ask ourselves, why does not the Southern Church want to unite with us? We are anxious to unite with them, and we feel that they would reciprocate the feeling.

"One reason given is that the Church would lose its identity and its leaders would have less opportunity to lead. This is unworthy of the great Church in the South, which possesses men as capable of leadership in the united Church as any we have. If they are ambitious to hold their place of power, there need be no less of that ambition in the larger Church. But this is not true. The strongest opposition springs from the rank and file of the people, who have no such ambitions.

"The claim is made that there is a remnant of the feeling engendered by the Civil War days. But the men who were in the ministry then are in their graves, and their children are as loyal to the nation and national affairs as any north of the Mason and Dixon Line. Now and then a politician will refer to it to further his interests, but I would dismiss it as unworthy of consideration."

We are glad to see Mr. Woodfin expressing himself as he does on this subject. But we do not believe he is well informed on these points. Who it is that supposes that the objection to union comes from ambitious leaders, he does not say. The fact is that in the ordinary sense of that term there are very few in the Southern Church. What the rank and file of the Church is concerned about is that the Church itself will be swallowed up.

In the matter of what he terms "a remnant of the feeling engendered by the Civil War days," he says that he does not believe that is the trouble. But he does, like most of the writers in his Church, overlook the fact that the separation of the Southern Church was not caused by any "feeling engendered by the Civil War days," but that it came about from standing for the principle of the separation of Church and State.

The writer then undertakes to give what he considers the two reasons why the Southern Church is not in favor of union. The first he says is the alleged laxity on the part of his Church "in ordaining men to the ministry who are unsound and uncertain in their belief." He says, "the Southern Church is ultra conservative in theology and glories in it. It will not only not ordain a man who is unsound in the faith, but will not hold relations with an organization that does."

Two things are to be noted here. One is that he has not a word to say against the laxity of at least a part of his Church, which is admitted and condemned by his General Assembly. The second is that there is a vast difference between "holding relations with an

organization," and becoming a part of it. He refers to our connection with the Federal Council and says that it has been hard to keep us in it because there are "men and churches connected with it who are unsound in the faith." The reason that a large part of the Southern Church has favored withdrawal from the Federal Council has been that these men and churches have led the Council into doing what is contrary to the faith as we hold it. As long as we are a part of the Council we are really responsible for its acts.

He gives as his second reason why he thinks the Southern Church is opposed to union, the views on the relation of Church and State. He admits here that this was the cause of the separation, and that the Southern Church holds the same view to-day that it did sixty years ago on this subject. He says: "We confess a difference here. The Southern Church has emphasized the spiritual mission of the Church to what some of us would call the neglect of the social mission of the Church." He uses the treatment given the subject of temperance by the two churches as an example of what he means. Any reader who will take the trouble to look at a temperance map of the country will see that almost all the States in the South have prohibition while very few in the North have. "By their fruits ye shall know them." He also refers to the action of the recent Northern Assembly in asking Congress for national prohibition, that pledging the Church to the support of the government, and that in favor of woman's suffrage. He admits that neither of these resolutions could have been passed in the Southern Assembly. He says further: "What appears as a difference between us is only another reason for closer relation, for each would bring to the other something that would be of real help." What he expects either to bring to the other he does not state.

In order to bring about this union he says there are two things to be done. "The first is to press our work with all vigor in the South and Southwest." He does not explain what he means by "our work."

"The second thing that will hasten union is for us to practice on a small scale that for which we pray on a large scale." He denies the charge made by our Assembly that his Church has violated comity agreements. But magnanimously says: "We can afford to be generous in transferring members and even churches, where one congregation is the result. We will live in hopes of getting them back in time with big interest on the investment. Every member we transfer to them will work for organic union."

HYMNS.

A singing army is a conquering army. Music is as essential as ammunition. A silent church is a discouraged church, and a discouraged church is defeated at the start.

Is the church singing as she once did? The decline of congregational music is one of the most serious symptoms of the time. Rarely, outside of some great gathering of men, do we hear the soul-stirring hymns sung as they always ought to be. We do things by proxy nowadays, and many of us do our singing by proxy too. We would get as much spiritual benefit as if we prayed by a prayer-wheel. Singing is one exercise of the house of God in which every one has an active part, and when we decline to do so, we lose to that extent the benefit of music as a means of grace.

It is questionable if the modern hymns, which are sung in the main are as singable as

those of another day. Not that the jingling tune is not easier to learn, but we soon tire of it and the interest in it is lost quickly. Some in fact become positively distasteful, and when they are started, we lapse into silence.

Many of the modern hymns are simply emotional, and as the tides of emotion fluctuate greatly, we are often found singing high-tide hymns on a distinct ebb. The incongruity is more felt than expressed perhaps, but it must have a depressing effect on the music. It is sometimes painful to see the heroic efforts of the choir leader to arouse the emotion, without which the hymn sounds very flat. It cannot be easily pumped up, hence the flatness of the hymn.

The hymn often expresses a state of spiritual condition that is untrue. When we sing, "Perfect submission, perfect delight, I in my Saviour am perfectly blessed," the question naturally arises does this express the spiritual state of the singer, and if not, what a blasphemy it is to tell God and our neighbors that which is not true of our souls. The older hymns that expressed a lower condition of spiritual emotion were nearer the truth, and thus they abide. Ought not our hymns to be more prayers when they soar to heights of emotion, and even then we should be on our guard to really express what we desire? We should not sing, "Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord, to thy bleeding side," when we want to wander away into our own paths?

Nothing will lift the soul closer to God than a hymn that breathes the spirit of true prayer. Nothing will so warm our souls into a glow of inspiration as singing our desires in words of music. Most of the psalms are prayers and only indirectly tell us what the state of soul is. Many of us have learned the language of prayer from the words of some saint set to music.

Hymns ought to be instructive. This instruction should be simple and not in theological language, but behind the words should be some great teaching of the word, and the music suited to the truth expressed. In no way better can the truths be kept prominently before the mind. Those statements that would become platitudes when simply repeated continue to be sublime and soul-enchancing truths when sung to sweet melodies, "God in the Gospel of His Son makes His eternal counsels known," "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform," and many others express in undying interest the greatest of all truths.

Then we ought to have a return to the older hymns of the kingdom; not that new hymns should not be written. No doubt the stress of present day will be productive of other great hymns, as has been the experience of the Church in days past.

We ought to have a new hymn-book that will be largely the old. Above all, we ought to have a return to the habit of teaching the children to sing the grand hymns of the church. It can be done.

The book used in our Sunday-schools ought to be the same in use in the church, and should incorporate the best of the new hymns and melodies and all the old and approved hymns. Children are taught music now as never before, and yet they are not taught the hymns of the church in the home as was the custom years ago. The Sunday-school is the place where they are to be taught.

A. A. L.

A loving trust in the author of the Bible is the best preparation for a wise study of the Bible.—H. Clay Trumbull.